

6 STRATEGIES FOR SLEEP

Dampen daytime noise
When your sleep time is in the day, sleep is usually shorter and lighter than night sleep. Noises disturb you more easily because your biological clock says you should be awake. At the same time, the neighborhood outside is in full swing with people talking loudly, horns honking and doors slamming.

Lower the light
Bright light, such as full sunlight, turns on the wakeful side of our biological clock.

You sleep better if your bedroom is dark. Use blankets on the window if you can't buy heavy drapes or light-blocking blinds.

Eat right
Shiftworkers need healthy meals at regular times to maintain good health. But it's too easy to turn to high-fat, high-sugar fast foods for convenience or comfort food. A shiftworker's digestive system may already be stressed by trying to digest meals at 3 a.m. Heavy or greasy foods eaten before bedtime can further upset your stomach. If your work schedule is different from your family's, you may sleep better if you have light breakfast foods while the family is eating a heavy meal.

Work out and wake up
Get enough exercise before your shift to wake you up, but not so much that you begin work tired. Exercise and fresh air help you sleep later, and are also vital to general health and endurance.

Control the caffeine
Small amounts of caffeine, such as a few cups of coffee a day, are generally safe substances for improving your wakefulness. But don't load up on caffeine drinks near the end of your shift or you won't be able to fall asleep during the day.

Wind down
Give yourself a chance to shed the concerns of work before you lie down to sleep at home. If you are worrying about your responsibilities back at the hospital, try writing those worries on a piece of paper before you go to sleep. Plan to take action on your problems so you will remember to deal with them at the appropriate time.

Shifting to Shiftwork

Nodding off in front of the TV at home is harmless. But blinking out at work is different. When you have responsibilities in a healthcare facility, falling asleep for 30 seconds can cause a serious mistake. Whether you are preparing meals for patients, mixing a cleaning solution or monitoring life support equipment, you don't want your attention to fade. And when you're driving home after your shift, missing a stoplight can be fatal.

Many healthcare employees work shifts. That means their work schedules are outside the daylight hours of 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. when most workers put in seven or eight hours. Healthcare workers may work several long shifts in a row. Getting enough sleep beforehand to be alert on the job is a constant safety challenge.



Most people suffering from sleep loss are not aware that they have had a "micro-sleep" of a few seconds, but that's long enough to make an error in administering meds, or to cross the center line while driving to work.

Especially if they work the midnight shift, employees notice changes in their sleep soon after they start shiftwork.

Shiftwork answers a lot of needs. For the patient, it answers the need for 24-hour care. For the community, it answers the need for emergency and healthcare services at any hour.

For many workers, shiftwork answers the need for alternate working hours.

Some needs which shiftwork may not meet, however, are the human body's requirements for regular sleep and mealtimes. This, in turn, can have an impact on safety. If a person is lacking sleep, experiencing fatigue and general poor health, then the person is not able to focus 100 percent on working safely.

Exhaustion and the stresses of shiftwork also contribute to a variety of other problems. Shiftworkers may be at risk for digestive upsets, heart

problems, excessive chemical exposures on the job, repetitive strain, drug and alcohol abuse and other safety, health and family problems.

Shiftwork can have many benefits for everyone involved. But it is important to be aware of the hazards and of your own limitations to avoid injuries and illnesses.

SURVIVING SHIFTWORK HAZARDS



- On overnight shifts or when you are tired, work with special care. Use checklists for complicated tasks. Double-check your work and equipment.
- Be honest about fatigue. If you are too tired to work safely, tell your supervisor.
- Take care for your personal security when you commute in the dark. Travel occupied, well-lighted routes. Avoid isolated parking areas.
- If you work extended shifts, talk to your safety supervisor about the possibility of being over the safe limit on exposures to chemicals, noise or other hazards.

10 SHIFTWORK SMILES

Shiftwork isn't for everyone, but has perks for many.

Possible advantages:

- Sharing childcare.
- Shopping when stores not crowded.
- Attending children's school events.
- Playing sports when fees are cheaper.
- Pursuing artistic endeavors in daylight.
- Kids responsible and confident with more duties.
- You find time to go to school.
- You may earn more money.
- Cheaper movies at off hours.
- Daylight time with kids in summer.

FACT or FICTION?

FICTION: It's all the same to your body whether you work a day or night shift.

FACT: Your body has high points and low points in every 24-hour period. Body and brain functions usually slow down during the nighttime and early morning. These daily swings are called circadian rhythms. The timing is individual — you might naturally be a morning person or a night owl, or in between. Working while the body is at its low point is stressful and fatiguing, which increases the risk of accidents.